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ABSTRACT

This policy paper provides information about issues surrounding the education of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) student populations, noting that preparing non-English speakers to survive in English-dominant schools and society is more complex than current policy debates would suggest. The paper stresses the need for teachers who can deliver classroom practice that respects the language and culture of the child and effective, accommodative instruction that results in literacy and academic success for second language learners. It also discusses the context that distinctly favors the assimilation of CLD students, with little thought to their rich cultural heritage or the language knowledge they bring to the classroom. The paper suggests that at the policy level, this sociopolitical context poses a challenge for future support and development, and at the level of praxis, this context threatens efforts to better prepare school educators for the differential learning and transition needs of CLD students. The paper focuses on: terminology of the arena; demographics and the achievement gap; preparation of public school teachers and administrators; the legal context of teacher preparation for diversity; challenges for the field of education; implications of these challenges; and a call to action. (Contains 12 references.) (SM)

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Committee on Multicultural Education

Educators' Preparation for Cultural and Linguistic Diversity: A Call to Action [i]

March 2002

Introduction

The guiding motivation of this policy paper is to provide information about issues surrounding the education of culturally and linguistically diverse [CLD] student populations. Preparation of non-English speakers to survive in English-dominant schools and society is more complex than current policy debates would suggest. Of paramount concern in this paper is the need for teachers who can deliver classroom practice that respects the language and culture of the child, and effective, accommodative, instruction that results in literacy and academic success for second-language learners.

Of equal concern is the context that distinctly favors the assimilation of CLD students. There is little thought given to their rich cultural heritage or the language knowledge they bring to the classroom. At the policy level, this sociopolitical context poses a distinct challenge for future support and development. At the level of praxis, this context threatens efforts to better prepare school educators for the differential learning and transition needs of CLD students.

This paper is arranged in seven sections addressing key terminology, demographics and the achievement gap of CLD students, preparation of public school teachers and administrators, the legal context of teacher preparation for diversity, challenges for the field of education, implications of these challenges, and a call to action.

Terminology of the Arena

The phrase *culturally and linguistically diverse [CLD] student*, is in our view, most holistically descriptive of a student whose culture and/or language are assets for learning, but nonetheless different, from that of the dominant culture and/or language in American society. Since diversity implies a multi-dimensional learning environment, CLD is also affirmatively descriptive of students who will need *accommodative programming and instruction* to facilitate their cultural and linguistic development within a content-focused learning context.

Acculturation defines the process of learning about and living in another/second culture. Individuals who acculturate by *assimilation* are expected to relinquish their own cultural (and sometimes language) identity. Individuals who acculturate by *adaptation* maintain their own cultural heritage (and frequently language) as they learn another.

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Accommodation is best understood, according to the notion of mutual (two-way) accommodation (Nieto, 2000). According to Nieto, a belief in one-way accommodation is at the heart of educational strategies, which view academically unsuccessful students as culturally deprived or genetically inferior to those who are successful. *Mutual accommodation*, on the other hand, enables teachers and schools to recognize and build upon the resources and assets that CLD students bring to the school. These resources, when used as a basis for instruction, enhance students' capacities and abilities to reach academic success.

The CLD Student

The rapid increase in the CLD student population is changing the fabric of the American classroom. At the same time, the academic achievement gap between these students and others in the schools is widening.

Demographics

In the last decade, the enrollment of CLD students across the nation has grown at a phenomenal rate of 104.97 percent (National Center of Educational Statistics, NCES, 2002). This growth rate represents an annual increase equal to five times that of the total enrollment in public schools. Today, one in five students throughout the nation comes from a home in which a language other than English is spoken (Crawford, 2000). Additionally, the patterns of migration among CLD students and families within the United States are also changing. The largest and fastest growing CLD student populations continue to concentrate in such coastal states as Florida, California, and Texas. In addition, Midwestern states such as Kansas, Indiana, Iowa, and Nebraska have experienced a dramatic increase in CLD student enrollments over the past two decades. Such increases have exceeded 200 percent per annum in many Midwestern states (NCELA, 2002). This current pattern is a precursor of what is yet to come. Current projections indicate that school-aged children whose first language is not English will constitute an estimated 40 percent of the K-12 age population in the U.S. by the year 2030 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Similarly, if current trends continue, Hispanics will account for 25 percent of the total U.S. population by 2050, and may constitute 33.3 percent of the population by 2100 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

There are over 400 languages currently represented in U.S. schools. Spanish-speaking students comprise 77 percent of the total CLD, K-12 population. Indeed, by far the most common language, other than English, spoken across the nation is Spanish. Other languages representing the remaining 23 percent include Vietnamese, Hmong, Haitian Creole, and Korean, which round out the top five languages spoken by CLD, K-12 students in the U.S. Each comprise one to three percent of this total population (USDE, 2002).

Achievement Gap

Perhaps the central concern regarding CLD students across the nation's schools is how well they are performing. Unfortunately, national data on the performance of CLD students is very limited. This is most certainly the case with immigrant students. These students constitute one of the fastest growing groups of CLD students, yet sound and valid data on their achievement, school and grade completion rates, and college attendance patterns remain exceptionally limited. Although many reasons account for limited data on CLD student achievement, the number of CLD students across the nation who are consistently exempted from standardized tests is particularly problematic. Regrettably, as the pressure for test-measured accountability increases, so do the number of CLD students exempted from standardized testing.

What we do know is that CLD students are more likely to drop out of school, have disrupted schooling, lower attendance, and be under-represented in higher level courses in high school. Additionally, among students who score below the 35th percentile on national achievement tests, about 13 percent of the first and third graders and about six percent of the lowest achievers in seventh grade are CLD students (NCES, 1999). The drop out rate among these students continues to average over 40 percent, especially where native language- to- English transitions have proven difficult (NCES, 1999). Not surprisingly, the USCRC (1997) found that CLD students, nationally, are three times more likely to be low achievers than high achievers; two times more likely to be at least one grade level behind in school; and four times more likely to drop out than their native-English-speaking peers.

Public School Educators

Increases in the number of CLD students in U.S. schools are placing greater demands on teacher preparation as well as professional development programs for inservice educators. School educators need support in developing the capacity to provide appropriate and effective instruction for CLD students. According to the National Center of Educational Statistics [NCES] (1997), only 2.5 percent of teachers who teach CLD students hold a degree in either Bilingual or English as a Second Language (ESL) education. States that have the least experience with CLD student populations face the greatest shortage of certified bilingual and (ESL) teachers (AAEE, 2001). Although most CLD students spend the majority of their school day in grade-level classrooms, most teachers in these classrooms have little or no training in the differential learning and development needs of these students. Of the total number of public school teachers across the nation, only 12 percent of teachers who have CLD students in their classrooms have had eight or more hours of professional development specific to the needs of this student population (NCES, 2002). Consequently, few teachers are prepared to provide instruction specifically designed to meet the linguistic, cognitive, academic, and emotional development needs of these students.

As the diversity of the grade-level classroom has increased, the instructional practices to address this diversity have, for many teachers, remained unchanged. They use curricula and materials that do not adequately serve the needs of their CLD learners. According to Short, "The lack of familiarity with their students' cultures, learning styles,

and communication patterns translates into teachers holding negative expectations for students, while inappropriate curricula, assessments, and instructional materials are used with these students, compounding the problem" (Short, 1999, p.107).

Legal Context

The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education is cognizant of the legal context of teacher preparation for diversity. Multiple court decisions have varied with respect to the support of using the native language of students as the basis for instruction. The landmark Supreme Court case, *Lau v. Nichols (*1974*)*, ruled that schools had an obligation to adequately prepare CLD students. The justices did not propose solutions due to the fact that they believed that only educators could recommend specific remedies for the education of CLD students. Instead, in *Castañeda v. Pickard* (1981), the Court stated that programs should be based on sound educational theory (a theory supported by experts). As a result of the particular theory adopted, using only English for instruction of CLD students was considered acceptable.

Presently, state referenda are changing the mandates on education of CLD students. Short-term English-only instruction in special classes, followed by integration in mainstream classrooms are replacing bilingual education programs. As a result, increasing numbers of unprepared students are entering classes with unprepared teachers. We encourage school educators to acquaint themselves with the legal precedents and mandates for educating CLD students.

Regardless of mandates, educators should be mindful of the words of Justice Douglas in the *Lau v. Nichols* ruling:

> *"There is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum; for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful, education.*
>
> *Basic English skills are at the very core of what these public schools teach. Imposition of a requirement that, before a child can effectively participate in the education program, he must have already acquired those basic skills is to make a mockery of public education. We know that those who do not understand English are certain to find their classroom experiences wholly incomprehensible and in no way meaningful"* (Lau v. Nichols, 1974).

Challenges

AACTE recognizes that changing demographics and sociocultural dynamics in public schools require the following:

- Teachers/administrators who are better prepared to critically reflect upon the complex dynamics of appropriate accommodations for cultural and linguistic diversity;

- Teachers/administrators who advocate for CLD students;
- Teachers/administrators who are better prepared to analyze, plan, deliver, and evaluate curriculum and instruction that has been modified and adapted for the differential learning and transition needs of CLD students;
- Teachers/administrators who are better prepared to critically evaluate widespread and popular curriculum initiatives, especially pre-packaged curricula, for their applicability with and potential impact on CLD student achievement;
- A curriculum for the preparation of school leaders which prompts them to value and explore both the biographical assets which the CLD student brings to school and the valuable contribution of caregivers, extended family members, and community;
- An enhanced emphasis on advocacy for norm- and criterion-referenced testing in schools which accommodate CLD students at their level of readiness and development, and which is not culturally or linguistically focused to the extent that purposive monitoring and evaluation of process and product gains are precluded.

AACTE must exhibit leadership in these matters. In complex environments of practice, creativity, flexibility, professional development, and collaboration, the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education seeks to set a new direction, which incorporates these essentials, in a unified effort of proactive leadership.

Implications

As educators, the foundation upon which we practice our craft is rapidly changing. Either we and our respective institutions adjust to meet this change, or the scenario will be one of institutional failure. First, education is the bedrock of the national economy, providing a capable work force that is prepared to participate in a competitive, global market place. Clearly, CLD students now constitute the fastest growing segment of the educational systems in the nation. Concomitantly, this segment demonstrates unacceptably low levels of achievement, coupled with the highest dropout rates. This scenario is fast becoming untenable. What is the purpose of our school systems if the fastest growing segment of their student populations are consistently unable to complete the program, or unable to graduate with a diploma? Qui bono?

Second, the inequitable education of CLD students, as a result of cultural and linguistic differences, is a denial of their civil rights. Currently, these students arrive in the system with needs and differences for which the current system is unprepared. It is the system that must adjust to accommodate these increasingly prevalent differences through differentiated curriculum and instruction. Culturally and Linguistically Diverse students cannot change their prior socialization in a particular culture or in a particular language. Instead, the system must adjust its practices, build capacity for diversity, and professionally accommodate these differences.

Inevitably, the policies and infrastructures of the institution we call schooling must change to accommodate the changing foundation upon which their existence rests. However, change must also begin with the educators who deliver the services of this institution in society. School educators, especially classroom teachers, must be better prepared for the changing fabric of the American classroom.

Call to Action

AACTE is committed to supporting and moving forward the agenda of ensuring an equitable education for students whose primary language is not English. The Association challenges institutions of higher education to commit to transforming the preparation of educators at all levels to address the changing demographics of American public schools. To this end, AACTE will support partnerships to unite and begin the transformation process in teacher/administrator preparation. Specifically, AACTE invites all member institutions to collaborate in addressing the inclusion of diversity in teacher preparation.

• *Sociocultural:* Diversity in teacher preparation must emphasize the sociocultural struggles that CLD students endure. These include learning another culture, acquiring a second language, integrating their world views, performing well in the content areas, and adapting their personal knowledge within the American classroom. Teachers must be prepared to understand and support the acculturation process in a mutually adaptive way, building bridges between the student's prior cultural knowledge and that of a new cultural environment, including the culture of the school. Teachers must be professionally prepared to explicitly teach the norms, beliefs and expectations of school contexts and society-at-large while affirming the student's cultural heritage, previous knowledge, and native language proficiency.

This preparation for diversity must begin with the teacher. Teachers must be taught to explore their own socialization in a particular culture as a basis for understanding perspectives on, attitudes toward, and professional responsibility with CLD students and families. They must learn to test the validity of the influence of their own cultural filters upon their own perspectives and actions in practice. Moreover, teachers must be prepared to value, affirm, and maximize the rich cultural heritage that CLD students bring to the school. Ultimately, teachers must be prepared to acquire the field experiences and learning necessary to understand the acculturation process of students from cultures and languages different than their own.

• *Language:* Teacher preparation and professional development for diversity should explore and discuss theories and stages of the second language acquisition (SLA). Teachers need experiences in their preparation that allow them to understand the realities of negotiating academic instruction in another language. Teachers should understand why native language and associated cognitive development are critical to academic success and language acquisition in English. They should incorporate the use of the students' native language in their teaching, and support language and academic learning objectives as well as literacy development in English. Teachers must be prepared to distinguish

social from academic language proficiency, so as to avoid erroneous assumptions about the learner's preparedness for academic learning. They must be prepared, through well-designed field experiences, to structure environments that promote accumulative, communicative, and constructive language acquisition and literacy development in a second language.

• *Cognitive:* Teacher preparation and professional development for diversity must encompass a deep understanding of cognitive development challenges and processes for CLD students. In this regard, prospective teachers must be prepared to differentiate curriculum, instruction, and assessment to accommodate differences in preferred learning styles. Teachers' field experiences should emphasize the use of context and prior knowledge. Furthermore, teachers must also be prepared to teach students strategies that maximize their cognitive, metacognitive, and social-affective skills in problem solving and critical thinking.

• *Academic:* Teacher preparation and professional development for diversity must include an understanding of culturally and linguistically mediated instruction in all content areas. This instruction must be scaffolded and/or sheltered, process and product driven, and grounded in sound theory and methodologies explicitly designed for CLD students. Reductionistic curricula, programs, and instruction may seem sufficient to target social language learning among CLD students, but will not develop the academic language and content learning necessary for successful performance in school.

Ultimately, institutions of higher education must demonstrate critical reflexivity regarding the readiness of their faculties to achieve these benchmarks of teacher preparation and professional development for diversity. Prior socialization is as much an issue for collegiate faculty as it is for grade-level classroom teachers. It requires the capacity to influence perspectives on preparation, attitudes toward the accommodation of diversity, and actions in practice. Accordingly, cross-culturally sensitive professional development and accommodation training are each equally as applicable to college faculty members as they are to public school educators.

Vavrus (2002) suggests that teacher education programs play a crucial role in determining teachers' attitudes toward diversity and the accommodation of that diversity within their teaching. He strongly recommends that faculty members engage themselves in self-study and internal evaluations to better understand their capacity to infuse diversity issues throughout the curriculum.

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